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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY BOARD

1 November 1976

The Honorable George Bush
Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear George:

The Board shares the deep concern expressed in your letter to me of 22 October 1976 regarding the William Beecher article on the competitive analysis experiment published in the Boston Globe and the Washington Star on 20 October.

To the extent that there is a potential for additional disclosures of a more substantive -- and thus more damaging -- nature, I agree, as we discussed when we last talked, that special importance attaches to your effort to identify the source(s) of the leak. I also agree that this task may be made somewhat easier in that Beecher's article contains data so specialized that its understanding must have been limited to the team itself and to a handful of others who have been actively involved in the experiment.

We also share your apprehension that further leaks may jeopardize the ultimate utility of the experiment by mischaracterizing its nature and by distorting its objectives. For this as well as other reasons (including the possibility that you might decide to take a public initiative if, for example, the Beecher story is followed up), it is essential that there be a clear and unambiguous understanding as to the purposes of the experiment in competitive analysis.

I believe we should develop this understanding based on the ground rules jointly arrived at by the Board's NIE Evaluation Committee and your Deputy for National Intelligence Officers, which are reflected in my letter to you of 8 June 1976. The more relevant parts of this letter state:

The purpose of the experiment is to generate, from the fragmentary evidence which is available, possible alternative

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descriptions, explanations and judgments of Soviet activities, capabilities and objectives.

(Discussions between competitive teams and eventually with the NFIB) will not -- repeat not -- be aimed at striking compromises or reaching consensus judgments. Their purpose, instead, will be to insure that both (teams) are, having been motivated to construct alternatives, compelled to defend their assertions and their use of evidence and analysis before peers equally well versed in the technical details of their respective subjects.

There has been no intention that the experiment force a "worst-case" view of Soviet objectives. Nor did the NIE Evaluation Committee, when it suggested for your staff's consideration a number of people it believed qualified, intend thereby to encourage a selection of team members whose efforts would be predictable irrespective of the evidence made available for their analysis. (Of the seven individuals identified in Beecher's article, I believe that only two originated as Committee suggestions.) Indeed, the essence of the experiment's purpose was reflected most recently in a status report of 4 October 1976 from Mr. Lehman, which reiterates that:

The mandate of the three "B" teams was to take an independent look at Soviet strategic objectives...to determine whether Soviet goals are in fact more ambitious...and thus, by implication, present a more serious threat to US security -- than the case being reflected by the authors of National Intelligence Estimate 11-3/8-76, "Soviet Forces for Inter-continental Conflict."

Members of the "B" teams were recruited from among senior political and military analysts experienced in Soviet affairs, based on the guidance of the Estimates Evaluation Committee of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

We believe that purposes such as these, aimed at seeking new ways of improving the analytic process and thus the intelligence which is provided to the national leadership, are important. Should it become necessary to publicly explain, in our view the true facts will commend you and the intelligence community to the American people for the integrity and objectivity of this unique effort.

Sincerely,



Leo Cherne
Chairman

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B. C. Evans
Executive Secretary
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Date

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NIE 11-3/8-76, EXPERIMENT IN COMPETITIVE ANALYSISEvaluation of A and B Team ReportsI. Summary and Issues for DecisionGeneral

1. The three topics selected for the experiment-- Soviet ICBM accuracies, low altitude air defenses and strategic objectives--involve markedly different types of analyses.

--Estimates of ICBM accuracies

--Estimating the low altitude capabilities of Soviet air defenses compared to estimating ICBM accuracies is orders of magnitude more complicated. It requires estimates of several performance characteristics of many weapons and their support systems and requires estimates of how well all the air defense elements would work in combination under combat conditions.

--Estimates of Soviet strategic objectives of which Soviet objectives for their intercontinental nuclear forces are a part, require perceptions of the USSR in its entirety--ideology, internal and foreign policies, international conduct, economic performance and prospects, military capabilities and military development and deployment programs.

2. It follows that any comparison or evaluation of the A and B Team reports intended to discern the substantive basis for their findings will differ widely for the three subjects. As the officers responsible for issuing the NIE and for conducting the experiment, our evaluation of the competing analyses should attempt to answer three questions: (1) Do the B Team reports contain important findings about substance, variables, or uncertainties which were overlooked or inadequately treated in the NIE draft by the A Team? (2) Does the preparation of competing analyses, as exemplified by the three B Team reports, improve the NIE preparation process? (3) Would the inclusion of the competing analyses in the final product make the NIE more useful to its users?

3. The B Team members for each of the three topics were selected from among those experts known to have a somber view of the Soviet threat. The B Teams were expected to marshal the evidence, rationale and arguments supporting more threatening interpretations than appearing in past NIEs even though such interpretations may be considered less likely than the NIE findings.

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In this respect, the three reports vary. The B Team report on Soviet ICBM accuracies represents an alternative interpretation of a well-defined body of evidence. It is not clear whether the B Team regards the accuracies estimated in its report as more likely to represent the true accuracies of Soviet ICBMs than the accuracies estimated by the A Team. Presumably, the B Team would not insist on substituting their assessment for that of the A Team, but would include it in the NIE as an alternative interpretation of the evidence. The B Team reports on Soviet strategic objectives and low altitude air defenses appear to represent what the B Teams believe to be best estimates. Presumably, they would substitute their estimates for the findings of the A Team on these subjects.

Soviet Strategic Objectives

4. The A and B Team reports differ in their scope and content. The A Team, in Chapter I of the NIE draft, estimated Soviet objectives for strategic nuclear forces for intercontinental conflict through the mid-1980s. The B Team report addresses Soviet strategic objectives in the broader context of all elements of the USSR's national power and estimated overall Soviet political and military goals to be achieved at some indefinite time in the future. The B Team contends that the failure of the NIE drafters in the past to recognize or to address the true nature of Soviet strategic objectives has resulted in underestimates of Soviet forces. The B Team would undoubtedly acknowledge that the subject matter of its assessment does not parallel the A Team assessment in Chapter I of NIE 11-3/8-76 but would contend that its approach to and findings about Soviet objectives should be substituted for those in the draft NIE.

5. Half of the B Team report consists of a critique of certain strategic developments which in the opinion of the B Team, were either misinterpreted or discussed too lightly in NIEs. This section of the report is intended to provide examples supporting the B Team position that past NIEs were based on incorrect assumptions and to provide part of the evidential basis for the B Team's own conclusions about Soviet strategic objectives. Some of the B Team assessments of these developments are consistent with intelligence findings, some are not and some contain statements which challenge the integrity of those preparing the NIEs.

6. Principal issues for decision:

--Are there important differences in estimates of ultimate Soviet objectives, as contained in the B Team report, which impact upon other assessments in NIE 11-3/8-76?

--Should Chapter I of NIE 11-3/8-76 include findings about the overall Soviet objectives as addressed in the B Team report?

--How seriously should we treat the B Team's critique of certain strategic developments and its implication that perceptions of Soviet ultimate goals should influence our judgments when faced with uncertainties about Soviet forces and intentions.

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